



# Summit Report

**September 29, 2005**

## **Thank you to the following groups for their ongoing participation in the Employment First Coalition:**

- *Indiana APSE: The Network on Employment*
- *INARF*
- *The Arc of Indiana*
- *Social Security Administration*
- *Indiana Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning*
- *Vocational Rehabilitation Services*
- *BehaviorCorp*
- *Mental Health Association in Indiana*
- *Indiana Protection & Advocacy*
- *Indiana Institute on Disability and Community*
- *Supported Employment Consultation & Training (S.E.C.T.) Center*
- *Governor's Council for People with Disabilities*

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# Executive Summary

## **Indiana's Employment First Summit**

## Executive Summary - Indiana's Employment First Summit

On September 29, 2005, leaders from government, business, the provider community, education and consumer/advocacy organizations gathered in Indianapolis to begin creating a strategic plan for ensuring competitive employment is an outcome for all Hoosiers with disabilities. Recent breakthroughs in education, rehabilitation, assistive technology, and transportation have added many people with disabilities to the workforce.

However, Hoosiers with disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any minority. They want to work and reduce their reliance on state and federal subsidies. Some are able to secure employment on their own but many need assistance to overcome stereotypes, develop work experience, and become independent. The Indiana Employment First Coalition believes that a strong economy is fueled by all Hoosiers working and contributing to the bottom line. Hoosiers with disabilities must be enlisted as part of the economic development strategy to move the Indiana workforce forward.

During the Employment First Summit, participants identified many strengths of Indiana's current employment system to build upon, such as:

- ***Ensuring accurate and timely information about the impact of work on benefits*** through the Benefits Planning, Assistance & Outreach program and the innovative Benefits Information Network;
- ***Maximizing income and asset opportunities*** through the M.E.D. Works program for employees with disabilities moving toward self-sufficiency and greater financial independence; and
- ***Employment vision and guidance*** from key leaders participating in Indiana's Employment Leadership Group.

### Finding Solutions to the Barriers to Employment

Summit participants focused heavily on identifying strategic solutions toward reducing barriers to employment for people with disabilities. These solutions included:

- Establishing ***reliable, accessible and affordable transportation*** for workers to get to and from the job;
- Connecting to the economic development systems, such as the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, to ***ensure employers have what they need*** to offer jobs to Hoosiers with disabilities;
- Developing more ***financial incentives*** for service providers to make competitive employment a shared outcome;
- Disseminating more ***information*** to people about the benefits of employment and the resources that this untapped workforce can bring to our economy;
- Coordinating ***integrated, community support*** for people to make living *and* working in the community the "norm"; and
- Maximizing opportunities for our young people by ***improving transition supports and increasing work experience*** for our high school kids.

The Employment First Coalition will continue to bring together key stakeholders to implement these strategies. For more information on the Summit, contact Susan Rinne at [srinne@kiva.net](mailto:srinne@kiva.net).

Members of the Employment First Coalition include: IN-APSE: the network on employment, INARF, Indiana Arc, Social Security Administration, Office of Medicaid Planning and Policy, Vocational Rehabilitation, BehaviorCorp, Mental Health Association in Indiana, Indiana Protection & Advocacy, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, SECT Center and Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities

# Indiana Employment First Summit

## **A Strategy for Action**

## **Indiana Employment First Summit** *A Strategy for Action*

On September 29, 2005, leaders from government, business, the provider community, education, and consumer/advocacy organizations gathered in Indianapolis to begin creating a strategic plan for ensuring competitive employment is an outcome for all Hoosiers with disabilities. More than 100 individuals across the state participated in the Summit. The purpose of the day was to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of Indiana's current employment system. Summit participants also focused heavily on identifying strategic solutions toward reducing remaining barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

A unique component of this Summit was the intentional effort to understand and capture people's experience of the employment system through focused dialogues among stakeholder *and* cross-stakeholder teams. In the morning, five teams met to discuss barriers to employment as "affinity groups" – groups separated by employers, educators, service providers, state agency staff/policy makers, and consumers/advocates. In the afternoon, the groups intermingled to review the barriers and work as integrated teams to develop solutions to these issues. By creating this type of forum, leaders from all sectors were able to agree on what the barriers are and to then identify where their role in the solutions could be most effective.

In addition to the rich discussions in the group settings, Summit organizers provided another opportunity for participants to express themselves by entering information into computer stations throughout the day. These computers were available to capture real-time thoughts and ideas that may not have been voiced during the sessions due to time constraints or other reasons. We've included the highlights from these surveys in the body of this report and the full results in the appendix.

The resulting report from the Summit—*A Strategy for Action*—documents both an important starting place in the employment discussion for policymakers and advocates alike, and, a bevy of solutions for consideration and action. This product may be considered the first of a continuing effort by the **Employment First** Coalition to bring key stakeholders together to implement these and other innovative strategies to increase competitive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. To get involved, contact Susan Rinne, Employment First Coalition, at [srinne@kiva.net](mailto:srinne@kiva.net).

### **STRENGTHS OF INDIANA'S EMPLOYMENT INFRASTRUCTURE**

During the *Employment First* Summit, participants identified many strengths of Indiana's current employment system to build upon, most notably the existence of quality resources to ensure people with disabilities understand how work can impact benefits—including access to needed healthcare coverage (e.g., Indiana Works). Specifically, participants identified these as strengths in Indiana:

- ***Ensuring accurate and timely information about the impact of work on benefits*** through the Benefits Planning, Assistance & Outreach program (Indiana Works) and the innovative Benefits Information Network (BIN) which provides preliminary benefits information to Indiana Works as well as ongoing assistance with understanding the impact of work on benefits;
- ***Maximizing income and asset opportunities*** through the Medicaid program, M.E.D.Works, for employees with disabilities moving toward self-sufficiency and greater financial independence; and

- ***Employment vision and guidance*** from key leaders participating in Indiana's Employment Leadership Group.

## ***WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?***

Summit participants, working in teams by profession (or “affinity”), spent some time identifying the systemic, workforce and social barriers to employment. These teams, comprised of employers, Teachers and Educators, Adult Service Providers, State Agency Staff/Policy Makers, and Consumers/Advocates, captured the top barriers to employment for discussion and analysis. Not surprisingly, the various group identified several common barriers, including the following:

### **COMMON BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT ACROSS AFFINITY GROUPS**

- 1) State agencies, providers, and local community institutions (such as schools) do not have enough incentives to collaborate meaningfully.
- 2) Families, employers, services providers, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, and individuals with disabilities themselves still need more education that competitive employment is a real option.
- 3) The lack of transportation for workers to get to the job-site is a major barrier to employment.

In addition to these barriers identified across groups, Summit participants identified a number of other barriers to employment:

### ***Employers***

Employers and members of the business community identified several issues as key barriers to employment for people with disabilities, especially a lack of information about how to hire someone and ensure they have adequate supports to maintain and succeed in the workplace. Other barriers identified by employers included:

#### ***Systemic Barriers***

- Services are not always customized and individualized to the person
- Need for education
- Ignorance about transitional skills
- Minimal Vocational Rehabilitation hours authorized for assessment
- Internal service provider pressure to bill
- Transition from high school to adult work world
- Getting parents, business, and educators to work together
- Need for shared vision and partnership
- Lack of education regarding availability of services

#### ***Workplace Barriers***

- Health and safety issues
- Perceived cost of hiring

#### ***Social Barriers***

- Dealing with institutional mentality
- Public expectations
- Feast or famine with earnings
- Attitude and misconceptions --ignorance

## *Teachers and Educators*

Teachers and educators expressed a great deal of concern about barriers for youth transitioning to the adult system. Two particularly challenging issues included the disproportionate focus on ISTEP (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) testing (as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act) leaving youth with inadequate opportunities for workforce preparation, and a real need to better involve key providers – like Vocational Rehabilitation – earlier in the transition planning process on a more consistent basis. This group also identified the following as additional barriers to employment:

### *Systemic Barriers*

- Lack of staff, such as transition coordinators, to provide a bridging liaison between the school system and the adult system
- Lack of willingness to coordinate across various service providers to get critical information about the youth
- Lack of blending and braiding available funds to support work opportunities
- General lack of collaborative effort across the system
- Information, knowledge and networks for sharing best practices for employment specialists don't exist
- Need a Business Leadership Network
- ISTEP testing results in a lack of preparation to enter the workforce

### *Workplace Barriers*

- Vocational Rehabilitation supports are different in policy versus practice and applied inconsistently statewide
- Disconnect exists between employers and schools – not enough emphasis on developing internships, job shadowing, job fairs, and other opportunities

### *Social Barriers*

- Family issues, concerns and fears about employment can prevent successful work opportunities

## *Adult Service Providers*

Service providers and staff from community-based organizations that provide employment and training supports to people with disabilities noted repeatedly that key barriers remaining for people with disabilities include the length of time it takes for a person to get support services in place, including getting through the process. Other barriers to employment included:

### *Systemic Barriers*

- Uncoordinated services
- A lack of provider competition
- Transportation
- Lack of education on benefits available
- One size ***does not*** fit all in terms of providing services to different disability populations (people with mental illness versus people with physical disabilities, etc.)
- Workforce development system is not prepared for people with disabilities to use it effectively
- Stakeholders are not joining forces together
- There remain financial disincentives to work for the individual and the family



### *Workplace Barriers*

- Individuals with disabilities are treated ‘special’ and not like co-workers
- Education of consumers is not sufficient for job readiness
- Provider influence early on in the employment process is missing
- Ignorance about accommodations
- We expect employers to be “care givers” – we need to change this message and become better marketers of what employers need
- Staff turnover

### *Social Barriers*

- Attitudes, misperceptions
- Discrimination

## ***State Agency Staff***

State agency personnel identified gaps in information—including information about existing work incentives—as a key barrier to employment for people, as well as a continuing lack of a comprehensive infrastructure to support interagency collaboration and planning. In addition, this group identified the following barriers to employment:

### *Systemic Barriers*

- Lack of funding streams, specifically supported employment follow-along (SEFA)
- Underutilization of work incentives (sometimes professionals and counselors have the same fears as the people receiving benefits)
- Insufficient information sharing between professionals and policy makers

### *Workplace Barriers*

- Educating people in state government on programs, incentives and the populations they’re serving
- Different organizations not understanding what’s going on in other organizations
- Collaboration is not a priority

### *Social Barriers*

- Fear of trusting that the safety net of benefits will be there, including Social Security and other supports like housing

## ***Consumers and Advocates***

Consumers and advocates targeted several important barriers to employment, again citing the lack of information available about work opportunities and existing work incentives as a deterrent to people working more and employers hiring more people with disabilities. Consumers also identified a need for more people with disabilities to take leadership roles in the employment effort, through such mechanisms as the Employment Leadership Group. Other barriers identified included:

### *Systemic Barriers*

- Not enough education and training available to all sectors
  - Employers: need education about people with disabilities
  - Social service agencies: need training about rights for people
  - All: need education and training to change attitudes, fears and beliefs and to change the status quo
- Not enough employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- Inconsistent supports across Vocational Rehabilitation counselors
- Lack of transportation

### *Workplace Barriers*

- Not enough leadership from and by people with disabilities
  - People with disabilities should be in decision-making and leadership positions
  - People with disabilities need to be in positions to influence policy, decisions, and serve as role models
- Only entry-level jobs are available
- Lack of follow-along supports for someone once they have a job

### *Social Barriers*

- Marketing and public relations about hiring people with disabilities
- Social service providers and other employers without disabilities don't know about people with disabilities as a resource

### *Computer Survey Stations - Barriers*

At computer stations available throughout the Summit, participants were able to record thoughts and insights about the employment infrastructure in Indiana. The following information was recorded in response to this question:

#### **In your view, what are the top issues, or barriers, to employment for people with disabilities?**

The top response to this question was **transportation**, with eighteen respondents detailing the difficulties associated with the lack of an adequate, affordable and accessible transportation system in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The next most frequent barrier identified at the computer stations was **attitudes** about people with disabilities, with eleven comments describing barriers including attitudes of employers, business, public, professionals, and other myths surrounding disabilities.

The third most common barrier to employment identified in the electronic survey during the Summit was a **lack of employer education**, cited in ten responses. Specifically, this barrier included employers lacking information about:

- the needs of persons with disabilities;
- the skills that persons with disabilities have to offer;
- how people with disabilities can work and have much value to add to their businesses;
- accurate safety and accommodation issues;
- stigma/preconceived notions about what a person can do;
- discrimination and myths that employers have about people with disabilities;
- job performance capabilities; and
- insurance and accommodations.

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### ***WHAT ARE SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT?***

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In order for the five integrated stakeholder teams to maximize their efforts, each group focused on developing solutions to existing barriers within a particular policy context. The five policy contexts were:

1. Supporting a diverse workforce through business leadership
2. Promoting effective school to work transition
3. Aligning state policies to promote employment
4. Developing quality employment services
5. Becoming economically self-sufficient

### ***Common Trends Across Groups***

Despite the groups developing solutions to employment barriers in different policy areas, teams still identified several common solutions to barriers across the systems:

- ☑ **Information and resources:** Information was identified across the board as one key to effective systems change. Participants felt information sharing should be a priority and include work incentives as well as other key supports, such as housing and transportation
- ☑ **Collaboration:** Working together across agencies and systems – be it the Vocational Rehabilitation and the school system or between advocates, policy makers and the like – was another necessary component to removing employment barriers. Collaboration included not only the sharing of information, but also efforts to blend funding and coordinate planning for consumers
- ☑ **New focus on the employer community:** All groups expressed a common desire to make the case for employment as an economic issue rather than a social service issue. Summit participants felt strongly that people with disabilities are an untapped labor pool, and it is up to us to discover how to identify and fulfill this need (and others) of employers

Other strategies, solutions and recommendations for each group were as follows:

### ***Supporting a diverse workforce through business leadership***

Participants felt strongly that Employers need a good source of information about incentives that make it easier to hire people with disabilities. Specifically, the group discussed the value of creating a resource dedicated to helping employers navigate the wide range of programs and supports available to them to promote hiring people with disabilities. Other specific recommendations included:

- ☑ Educate and market to Indiana employers
  - Meet individually with employers
  - Network via Chamber of Commerce, service clubs, the United Way, and other organizations
  - Provide information that shows employers how hiring people with disabilities can benefit them economically
  - Replace myths about workers with disabilities with real stories
- ☑ Research employers to understand how we can meet their needs
- ☑ Prepare and coach individuals to meet employer expectations
- ☑ Create more job trial opportunities
- ☑ Share the *Employment First* fact sheet with employers
- ☑ Create an Indiana Business Leadership Network

### ***Promoting effective school-to-work transition***

Group participants identified youth as a critically important population to focus on as their first brush with employment and work opportunities can set the tone for a lifetime of success or failure. Many recommendations were articulated to support more resources for ‘transition council’ or coordinator models that serve to bridge the gap between the youth and adult systems for benefits, healthcare and employment. Other important recommendations included:

- ☑ Develop a mechanism, such as the Partners in Empowerment Forum, to bring together different partners to share and disseminate information across schools, businesses and social services
- ☑ Develop a network or other vehicles for ensuring staff (teachers) get information about best practices in employment, and expertise about transition. Allow teachers and staff to get time away for learning opportunities
- ☑ Make sure there is awareness about existing training by developing community joint training calendars
- ☑ Devise funding strategies that encourage and support coordination. For example, communication and “hand-offs” between the youth and adult systems need to be gradual, systematic, and planned
- ☑ Increase the number of transition coordinators to assist the high school coordinators
- ☑ Gather data to show how the lack of transition between school and adult service worlds negatively impact employment outcomes
- ☑ Blend funds across agencies, such as pooling funds to pay for a transition coordinator
- ☑ Create and invest in expertise of in-house personnel to know about services
- ☑ Create easy access to accurate information about Social Security, guardianship, and other issues
- ☑ Coordinate with the Disability Program Navigator to work with transition students inside the school districts
- ☑ Work with state and federal policymakers to address the challenges of ISTEP (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) related to identifying earlier students on a diploma versus non-diploma track
- ☑ Increase workforce opportunities and experience through internships, job shadowing, job fairs, etc.
- ☑ Work with local Vocational Rehabilitation offices to ensure policies are implemented consistently across areas

### ***Aligning state policies to promote employment***

Participants in this group saw the lack of information and awareness of all the “pieces of the puzzle” as a key barrier to successfully aligning various state and local policies to promote employment. Many solutions to this issue were offered, including the following:

- ☑ Look for blended funding mechanisms to assist with identifying which agency, program, or partner is able to perform which support or service
- ☑ Get involved in the strategic planning process with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and ensure people with disabilities get involved
- ☑ Disseminate a broader range of information to people, and increase the utilization of the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach projects as well as the Disability Program Navigators in the One-Stop system
- ☑ Focus on increasing opportunities for state policy makers to get more information about the programs, supports and services that exist to promote competitive employment
- ☑ Support additional transition councils at the local level to improve youth transition into the adult system
- ☑ Improved coordination among state agencies and state funded employment and training programs so information about work and disability is consistent
- ☑ Educate the front line staff, who often have the first contact with people with disabilities, at agencies and community-based organizations about competitive employment
- ☑ Use the Employment Leadership Group to continue to bring together information about resources and troubleshoot when programs are working at cross purposes

### ***Developing quality employment services***

Participants felt that there is a strong financial case to be made and marketed around hiring people with disabilities and the potential for positive impact on the Indiana economy. By considering how to package a message that appeals to employers, this group recommended identifying savings associated with people working as well as low-cost solutions to employment barriers—such as accommodations.

Other specific recommendations included:

- ☑ Launch a new marketing effort: use a business approach and a business message when talking about hiring people with disabilities – such as “Filling the Business Needs”
  - Individuals we serve should help be part of the marketing
  - Providers need to use business methods in marketing
  - Develop employment proposals to meet employer needs
  - Have to be comfortable in business environment
  - Business to business marketing
  - Establish Business Leadership Networks
  - Embark on a statewide campaign on the economic benefits of hiring persons with disabilities
  - Enlist the assistance of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) to develop the marketing campaign and strategies
  - Look for opportunities to partner with Eli Lilly and the Indiana University - Kelly School of Business
  - Include return on investment in marketing

- ☑ Develop provider networks to share tools
- ☑ Train providers on business approaches
- ☑ Diversify funding sources
  - Look to braid and blend private, public, and partnership dollars
  - State needs to make a commitment to long term funding for employment
  - All funding sources need to be fully explored
- ☑ Support more creative employment options
  - Look at work training, volunteer employment, and internships
  - Develop social enterprises to “feed” the mission
  - Develop customized employment opportunities and promote self employment
- ☑ Grants – information
- ☑ Developing more financial incentives for service providers to make competitive employment a shared outcome;
- ☑ Make it easier for the individual with disability to get and keep jobs
  - Provide incentives for keeping a job
- ☑ Develop consumer portfolios that work for eligibility across programs and across services
- ☑ Coordinate a public relations campaign to describe what kind of work is available for people and what kinds of skills make someone a desirable employee
- ☑ Respond quickly to individuals who are interested in working
- ☑ Increase the number of people with disabilities accessing benefit specialists. Encourage Community Rehabilitation Providers to offer this referral/service
- ☑ Increase limits on earned income (for Medicaid and other benefits) as individual gains tenure on the job
- ☑ Ensure that no file is ever lost

### ***Becoming economically self-sufficient***

This team identified many specific solutions for employment barriers that included an improved spectrum of incentives and information sharing for various stakeholders. The group also discussed the importance of tapping into popular media sources, such as television, to identify new ways to reach people with an employment message. Other specific strategies included:

- ☑ Improve transportation for people with disabilities
  - Develop incentives for employers such as providing transportation for people with disabilities to get to their worksite
  - Work with local Business Leadership Networks to encourage businesses to offer transportation

- Contact large companies (e.g. Lilly to lead the effort), bring aboard universities and colleges
  - Create non-traditional job opportunities – such as working from home
  - Promote companies who are “disability friendly”
- ☑ Increase consumer education and training on work incentives, benefits and rights
- Utilize media (such as TV or the Great Lakes Audio Conference)
  - Create networking opportunities and mentoring projects at the local level
  - Get people involved with the Independent Living Centers (ILC). Support additional ILC programming
  - Create a Speakers’ Bureau, Partners in Policy program, ICAN (Increasing Capabilities Access Network), etc.
  - Utilize COVOH (Council of Volunteers and Organizations for Hoosiers with Disabilities) for people to lobby for change
  - Make sure everyone is registered to vote
- ☑ Increase community and employer education about hiring people with disabilities to improve attitudes
- Partner with a larger organization (e.g., the Urban League)
  - Reach out to employers (large organizations) who promote “disability” and “hold their feet to the fire” concerning a diverse workforce
  - Work with colleges and universities to recruit people with disabilities to provide in-service trainings for human resource directors
  - Use the media
  - Encourage the use of employment fairs
- ☑ Encourage systemic changes with state & federal government
- Utilize the KEY directory to distribute information to United Way or larger organizations that may have the same or similar mission
  - Find a way to be added to the Indiana Economic Development Corporation strategic plan
  - Provide financial support to people with disabilities who own their own businesses to join the local, state Chamber of Commerce and network with their peers

### *Computer Survey Stations – Solutions*

At computer stations available throughout the Summit, participants were able to record thoughts and insights about the employment infrastructure in Indiana. The following information was recorded in response to this question:

#### **What are your top three solutions to address these barriers?**

The most common response to this question was to specifically **eliminate specific policy barriers to employment**, including the following:

- Address SEFA (Supported Employment Follow-along) issues
- Changes in state and federal laws that provide financial incentives for employers to provide employment opportunities to people with disabilities
- Changes in laws to limit discrimination in hiring people with disabilities and allow for easy inclusion in medical insurance programs
- Stop the quotas to get more productive--some just stop at the number instead of going further

- Change follow-along funding (Bureaus of Developmental Disabilities and Medicaid Waivers) to better support competitive employment
- Federal tax incentives
- Legislative changes
- Economic incentives

The next most frequent response from participants was to provide **more education and advocacy** on the issue of employment, including:

- More advocating, more training and teach more people that we are just like them
- Education, quality advocacy, and self-advocacy
- Educate employers, educate employees
- Education (2)
- Continue to educate individuals being served, families, advocates and educators on funding, benefits and appropriate transition that is conducive to available funding
- Involvement by people with disabilities
- APSE (Association for Persons in Supported Employment) and other groups

And the third most common solution proposed was to **develop business networks and training for employers**, including:

- Develop business networks and labor initiatives
- Institute a statewide Business Leadership Network that is business led
- Go into the business community to educate and train on incentives and etiquette
- Train business people to form effective partnerships
- Submit our recommendations to IEDC and do whatever it takes to get them included in their State plan
- Incentives for businesses to hire people with disabilities
- Talk the talk of employers
- Self-advocates could talk to employers about their issues and work out compromises. They could figure out different ways to make some jobs easier, and show them that their disability is not stopping them from doing their job